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ABSTRACT

This paper comes from an educator who worked on the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts in 1996. The paper states that the work offered the educator/author the opportunity to discuss the many dimensions of English language arts preparation programs for undergraduate and graduate school candidates in the participating colleges and universities. It also states that since 1996 he has followed the implementation of the Guidelines through various matrix outlines that the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and NCTE program evaluators have developed based on the Guidelines. The main part of the paper deals with his observations about the field of literary studies. It voices some concerns about the existing Guidelines and the related Matrix used as part of the NCATE project. Thee was concern that the inclusive approach taken while writing the Guidelines resulted in a posture toward literary studies that avoided the prescriptive stance of earlier editions. Earlier editions of the Guidelines required candidates to study the history of literature in courses designated as American, British, and world literature surveys. The earlier editions favored the broader and more inclusive requirement that candidates be exposed to "literatures of human cultures" or an "exhaustive body of literature and literary genres in English and in translation." The paper explains why dropping these designations will have a loosening effect upon curricula accepted under the new NCATE standards, and offers some examples. (NKA)

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by

Charles J. Thomas

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Author: CHARLES J. THOMAS
Paper delivered at the National Council of Teachers of English National Conference in Milwaukee, November 20, 2001
Title: "The Impact of Performance Assessment Through NCATE on Literary Studies in the Nation: Shakespeare, Thoreau, and Other Classic Authors Continue To Be Included"

My work on the NCTE Guidelines For The Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts in 1996 as a co-author of the content knowledge chapter and as the author of the chapter on the "Guidelines and Standards Relationships" offered me the privilege to discuss the many dimensions of English language arts preparation programs for undergraduate and graduate school candidates in the participating universities and colleges. These dimensions included the attitudes, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge skills and technologies that a distinguished committee at NCTE felt that an English Education candidate should demonstrate. The group was informed, articulate and forthright while advancing various positions on the above mentioned dimensions of teacher education and teacher performance. The Guidelines, published in 1996, will be in effect until 2006 when a revised edition will be published.

Since 1996, I have followed the implementation of the Guidelines through various matrix outlines that the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education or NCATE and NCTE program evaluators have developed based upon the Guidelines. I am a program evaluator and have helped to write the matrix currently used in the NCATE/NCTE project. It is, of necessity, different from the previous matrix based upon the 1986 edition of the Guidelines.

Fortunately, I can report that the NCATE program has been functioning successfully as a result of the good work of NCTE members. Such good results have been achieved partly because of the inclusive nature of the 1996 edition of the Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts. My colleagues

Robert Tremmel, Mike Angelotti, others and I have stressed that new ideas and approaches emerging from the fields of research and application need to be added to the existing framework in order to help teachers to assimilate these new ideas and to encourage appropriate change and growth in the profession. In short, the latest research and the latest successful experiences of teachers need to be included. Several cases in point were our inclusions of ethnic and gender literatures as well as reader response approaches to the teaching of literature as part of the Guidelines. Along with many of the original writers of the Guidelines, I believe that a healthy crop of quite diverse programs has, as a result of our additions, applied for and met this more inclusive set of standards for NCATE certification during the last five years.

Although I am aware of the strengths in the other dimensions of the Guidelines/Matrix, I will direct my remaining observations to the field of literary studies, the field of study which both drew me into the original project to write the Guidelines and, more importantly, kept me engaged in the sometimes heated development of the Guidelines. Along the way, I learned how fiercely democratic and academically astute the Committee on Teacher Preparation and Certification can be, and I have developed an abiding respect for its work at NCTE. Nevertheless, I want to voice some concerns about the existing Guidelines and the related Matrix used as part of the NCATE project.

My concern is that the inclusive approach of the teams writing the Guidelines resulted in a posture toward literary studies that avoided the prescriptive stance of earlier editions which required that candidates study the history of literature in courses designated as American, British, and World Literature surveys in favor of the broader and more inclusive requirement that candidates be exposed to "literatures of human cultures" or "an exhaustive body of literature and literary genres in English and in translation."
I have no quarrel with the spirit of these two phrases; however, I am concerned that new versions of the Matrix should not drop the

references to American, British and World Literature because the current Guidelines do not stress survey courses using these three designations. Dropping these designations will have a loosening effect upon the curricula accepted under the new NCATE standards. For example, while traditional American, British and World Literature survey courses are still offered at most universities in significantly expanded versions from what was more common even ten years ago (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Arabic, women, and minority literatures) other kinds of courses or varieties of literary encounters are also acceptable.

For example, one university recently offered a course in Contemporary World Literature which included only 20th century novels and short stories from six different countries as a fulfillment of the previous world literature, now "literatures of human culture," requisite for the NCATE matrix. While this offers an exciting and informative experience for candidates, it surely does not provide the history of literature foundation or overview that the American, British and World Literature surveys provided. Concern for providing a strong foundation in literature became so intense in New Jersey in 1996 that the New Jersey Education Association and its members successfully lobbied the college and university disciplines in the New Jersey to retain or to reinstate the survey courses so that English Education majors could attend them. This happened in a state that already requires its secondary school students to take four years of English, including American, British and World Literature surveycourses. Fewer years are required in other states.

Candidates from the state of New Jersey can be counted upon to have had a series of survey courses at the secondary school level if they are not obliged to suffer through the sequences at the university level. Nevertheless, I would prefer that they also conduct more advanced studies at the university level. My concern is that candidates in other states where less study of the history of literature is required in the secondary schools will not acquire an adequate knowledge base.

In fact, some dubious scenarios could occur. For instance, because a candidate may select from a wide range of literature courses such as Types of Literature, Social Aspects of Literature, Humanities, Minority Literatures, International Topics in Literature, Women in Literature, Contemporary World Literature and a host of other options, a history of literature knowledge base may not be built by the candidate. Surely, a history of literatures written in English over the last thousand years and a survey of literatures in translation from the last five thousand years should be expected of candidates. However, the current matrix may unwittingly allow for instruction of candidates exclusively in twentieth century literatures. In fact, Shakespeare, Thoreau and other classic authors are included in most programs being accredited by NCATE; however, they are being replaced in some programs by contemporary authors.

One of my courses for the doctorate at Columbia University, entitled Ways of Knowing, included a study of the heuristics or methods of discovery in fourteen separate disciplines. In no discipline did the method of advancing the knowledge base call for ignoring the history of the discipline. I believe that we do not wish to deny the candidates for degrees in English Education the opportunity to study the history of literature. Moreover, I trust that we will not earn the dubious distinction of being the first discipline to jettison its foundation.

Poem

If not Shakespeare and Thoreau,
Then, who should we save?
I know that I cannot say.
The foundation is shaking
At the gate
As the new pedants
Bury the authors they hate.

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